

Campaign against the criminalization of homelessness

Background

Though it has deservedly received the most media attention, Hungary is not alone in persecuting its homeless people with laws that criminalize their basic survival strategies and infringe on their human rights to live in dignity and safety. Examples of control policies on public spaces, bans on begging, and other control measures that either directly target or inadvertently impact homeless people exist in cities across Europe including Rotterdam, Montpellier, Barcelona, etc.

Housing Rights Watch and FEANTSA are concerned about the impact of laws and regulations being passed at local, regional and national level that specifically target homeless people or seriously impact their lives. These laws are unacceptable means to address homelessness, and some are plainly impossible to enforce: for example fining homeless people up to €150 or more for sleeping outside. These fines are impossible for homeless people to pay and it is more costly to the local authorities to keep someone in prison overnight than to provide appropriate housing.

It is an alarming development that major European cities are proposing and adopting repressive measures and controlling public spaces to prevent homeless people from using them. In some cases there appears to be a disconnection between policy making levels. Because many governments of EU Member States have committed to developing integrated homeless strategies and are promising to take steps towards ending homelessness, some municipal administrations are offering responses that will exacerbate the social exclusion and human rights violations of people experiencing homelessness. These measures are cruel, since they punish the poorest and most vulnerable. They are also ineffective, since they only make homeless people invisible by hiding them from the wider society but do not offer any real solutions to tackle homelessness.

Campaign launch – 8 June 2012

Housing Rights Watch and FEANTSA will launch the campaign on 8 June 2012.

Our goal is to develop tools that can support campaigns by local organizations against the criminalization of homelessness and poverty.

The campaign starts on 8 June 2012 in Brussels, Paris, Lyon and Budapest. Other cities will join as the campaign gains momentum over the summer and into the fall.

Tools and publications

Housing Rights Watch and FEANTSA will produce:

- Posters, leaflets, and other campaign materials in English, French and other languages,
- Website and campaigning tools – 1 June 2012
- An advocacy manual for organizations to use in their campaigns to call for local legislators to reverse and repeal repressive legislation. This manual will contain examples of good practice, suggestions for positive policy solutions, and other advocacy tools. (Based on examples published by the National Center on Homelessness and Poverty in the USA.)
- A European research project on the criminalization of homelessness in 10 EU cities. This report will be published in summer 2012 will examine existing policies and regulations, compare policy responses across participating countries, identify violations of human rights, and analyse the available statistics on incarceration rates and poverty.
- Events in various participating cities over the next 12 months

Partners

Housing Rights Watch and FEANTSA will work with partners at European, national and local level to raise awareness about the criminalization and penalization of homelessness and poverty. We hope to work closely with European partners in Brussels and some of their members – for example, Dynamo International – the Network of Street Workers – has already joined the campaign.

We are working closely with organizations at local and regional level, such as Fondation Abbe Pierre in France, and The City is for All in Budapest.

We are meeting with the HOPE network of homeless people to get their insights into the impact of these measures on people who were or are homeless.

We also hope to partner with some ‘untraditional’ allies. We will approach organizations like Eurocop and the European Association of Administrative Judges, because in many cases, the police and judges agree that it is absolutely unacceptable to fine, punish and imprison people simply because they are poor or homeless.

Get involved!

Please contact samara.jones@feantsa.org for more information and to join the campaign.

You can:

- Sign up to receive information about the campaign, research updates, etc.
- Receive invitations to campaign events – e.g. campaign launch on 8 June 2012 in Brussels at the Committee of the Regions at 13:15
- Join the campaign and support events in cities across the EU